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According to veteran video essayist Kevin B. Lee, 2014 was the year of the video essay. YouTube and Vimeo were flooded with both aspiring filmmakers and critics commenting on the patterns, tropes and styles present in either contemporary or classic cinema. Many focus around patterns of auteurism. Nevertheless, after 2014, the question must now be asked: Does the video essay have a valid future as a pedagogical medium, or is it simply a passing gimmick, lacking too often in a strong critical voice to sustain itself

in academic circles? The video essay has recently taken a huge step forward in terms of academic criticism however with the advent of the first ever 'Journal of Videographic Film & Moving Image Studies', [in]Transition[1] which provides *peer-reviewed* video essays which are both critical and non-commercial in nature.

Major players such as Kevin B. Lee[2], kogonada[3] (who now makes videos for the Criterion Collection) and recently Tony Zhou from *Every Frame a Painting*[4] have brought the medium to the fore through accessible, thought-provoking and

entertaining video essays which have been circulated across the internet on film websites and forums. In his essay 'What Makes a Video Essay Great?'[5], Lee notes the trends and, more importantly, the structures that have emerged from the recent rise of video essays. The main types of video essay are the supercut[6], the parody[7], the tribute[8](described here as a 'visual love-letter') and the hyper-narrated (as Lee calls it) video essay which is where Tony Zhou has come in and established a convention.[9]

When I delve into my research I am eventually going to hit a point

where I need to decide which of these structures and conventions suit my research, and which need to be disregarded. The problem the video essay has at the minute is that anyone (myself included) can make one, and more importantly, anyone (provided they know their material) can make one that gets noticed. This leads video essays to being perceived as much less academic as conventional text-based essays. The two issues I propose that need to be addressed are as follows:

- *Does representing your argument visually make a stronger (or equal strength) statement than*

*a text-based essay would have?
Just because an argument can
be represented visually doesn't
mean it needs to be said.*

- *What is the purpose of your video essay? Is it supposed to be academic? For popular consumption? A personal tribute to a director/movement? And how does that decision feed into your final project?*

In my case, my video essay will be academic in nature and will therefore need to include sufficient research and sources. There are a bunch of issues such as the ones raised above that I will need to tackle, but I hope that by doing so I

learn much more about the medium itself and how it engages with the academic world.

A problem I have at the minute with video essays is that basic filmmaking knowledge is being lauded as criticism, and, more importantly, is being held in higher esteem than the academic essays of Catherine Grant etc. A lot of these essays/essayists are entertaining, and unfortunately that is getting mixed up with providing a genuine argument. I have two examples of this, in which both essays seem to argue an interesting point but, when broken down, are really just examining

basic filmmaking language. First is Tony Zhou's admittedly entertaining and extremely well put-together video on David Fincher's craft[10]. Unfortunately what he describes as 'some of the best craft and directing right now, and is absolutely worth studying', is often just simple filmmaking (admittedly done well, but not as revolutionary as Tony proposes). Likewise in Max Tohline's analysis of the 'Symmetry in Wes Anderson's Editing',[11] he seems to fail to realise that all he is pointing out is that Wes Anderson shot the scene in a logical manner. The 'symmetry' is simply a case of

Wes Anderson's famed centred images working with eye-line matches and shot/reverse shot dynamics.

One of the most interesting video essays of the past few months from a metacritical point of view is undoubtedly *The Dissolve* critic, Scott Tobias' recent collaboration with Kevin B. Lee in a video essay analysing the use of voiceover in the work of Terrence Malick.[12] It is vital to ask here why an esteemed writer like Scott Tobias, who has carved out a career with words, has suddenly taken to the video essay to argue a point. For me, it's because a video essay was

more suited to argue his point than an article. In the essay Tobias could quote endless streams of dialogue with accompanying visuals and narration to argue his position in a digestible way. An article constantly quoting dialogue would have become cumbersome very quickly. Perhaps we will see more critics realising the value of the medium in future...